

# Making group work work

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# Kinds of group work

- Problem solving
- Skills practice
- Small group discussion
- Lecture breaks
- Other

# Research

- **Elementary education**

Blatchford, et al, 2001, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1990; Galton & Williamson 1990; Kutnick 2002; Ogilvy 1994

- **Second language acquisition**

Flowerdew, 1997; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica, 1987; MacIntyre, 2002; Loewen, et al, 2009

- **Business environment**

Hinds, et al, 2000; Neale, et al, 1999; Grzimek, 2014

- **STEM**

Gokhale, 1995; Humphreys, et al, 2001; Rosser, 1998; Rosenblatt, 2011.

# Reasons for group work

- High impact teaching
- Higher level thinking
- Social skills – listening, leadership, appreciation for diverse perspectives
- Preparation for real life
- Rhythm
- More participation
- Efficiency – stretching time & attention

# Israeli Culture and Society

Religion & state case study

preparation: articles

activity: role play real-life situation

task: solution

Family tree

prep: read novel, take notes, write  
response

follow up- questions and discussions

Film – information exchange

four films; guided discussion

groups

# Challenges

- Task design & articulation
- Group formation
- Behavior
- Differences
- Timing
- Assessment
- Classroom configuration

# Group formation

- Size – appropriate to task (and number of groups)  
maximize diversity **and** participation  
optimal size: 4-5? (pair-work, triads, larger groups for more complex tasks [subgroups])
- Self selecting, random, criterion-based, configured
- Complementary or equivalent?
- One-time, entire semester, or in-between



# Behavior issues

- Off-task -

Make sure that the directions are clearly articulated, that students understand their roles, and understand the assessment criteria; circulate among groups.

- Non-participation

Consider assigning roles; try to find out why the student is not participating; put quiet students in same group.

- Over-participation

Sit next to student who dominates/let student know (s)he doesn't need to do all the work/ask student to allow others to participate.

# Roles

- Assigned? By you? By a group member?
- For a task that results in a written document:  
Taking notes, creating outline, writing first draft, revising, reporting to the class
- For a discussion: Secretary, spokesperson, facilitator or timekeeper, etc.
- Consider asking a dominant person to take notes, a more reticent person to be the reporter

# Differences

- Social anxiety
- Different cultural norms
- Other

# Timing

- There is always one group that finishes before others, and/or one that takes longer to complete the task.
- Plan for it. Have an additional task – a follow-up question, a second charge - either for the group, or for each to work on individually.

# Follow-up

- There needs to be some follow-up to the group activity for students to think it has value (and, in fact, if there is not any follow-up, was it worth doing?).
- Follow up can be as simple as each group reporting briefly on their findings. If groups all have the same task, the reports can get redundant.
- If each student is responsible for the results of every group, the follow up discussion will be more highly valued.
- Written product
- Other

# Assessment

- Self-assessment
- Peer assessment – each student grades every group member; or has to apportion percentage of effort
- Instructor assessment
- Combination
- Clear criteria, rubrics for participation & contribution

# Take Aways: General\*

- Group work is a complex topic.
- There is no one-size-fits-all formula.
- Try varying the size and make-up of group-work.
- Similar group issues occur in diverse courses.

\* From the workshop participants

# Design and Value\*

\*from the workshop participants

- The task has to be well-constructed, and well-explicated.
- Start with learning outcomes. Think through the purpose of the group work before creating the assignment.
- Design the work to be of value to the students and the course.
- It should lend itself to being done in group.
- It should be more valuable than having the work done individually.



# Directions\*

- Clearly articulate goals and expectations of the group assignment.
- Make the value of the group work explicit.
- Give criteria for assessment ahead of time.

\* From the workshop participants

# Process\*

\* From the workshop participants

- Specify ground rules. Class-generated?
- Assign roles.
- Consider configuring the groups to account for dominant types, and for quieter students.
- Be clear regarding expectations for participation.
- Encourage discussion over getting the right answer; process over product.
- Especially for long-term groups, check in regarding dynamics before the midpoint; is intervention needed?

# Assessment\*

- Ask for documentation of process, contribution, etc.
- Consider including components that lend themselves to individual assessments.

\*from the workshop participants

# Last take-aways

- Not all classes, topics, activities, lend themselves to group work.
- Sometimes even the best-designed group activity doesn't work.
- Sometimes it is more successful than you think.
- Either way, consider what you can learn from each group and each activity.

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